



DEPARTMENT of the INTERIOR

news release

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

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FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE PROPOSES NONTOXIC SHOT ZONES FOR 1986-87

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is proposing to require nontoxic shot in portions of 44 States during the 1986-87 waterfowl hunting season to prevent lead poisoning in both waterfowl and bald eagles. The only States for which nontoxic shot zones are not being proposed are Alaska, Hawaii, New Hampshire, North Dakota, Virginia, and West Virginia.

The proposal includes significant expansion of "eagle protection zones" --areas where nontoxic shot is proposed specifically because of a threat to endangered bald eagles from lead poisoning--to include portions of 26 States in 1986-87. During 1985, "eagle protection zones" were designated in parts of eight States. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has documented more than 100 bald eagle deaths from lead poisoning since 1963. The majority of these cases have been recognized since 1980.

The nontoxic shot proposal for next year also includes 12 national wildlife refuges where recent monitoring studies have indicated a lead-poisoning problem. In addition, the proposal includes new nontoxic shot requirements in Iowa and Nebraska, based on the decisions of those States to prohibit the use of lead shot State-wide. Boundary adjustments, corrections, and additions for other States are also listed in the proposed rule.

Waterfowl get lead poisoning from eating spent lead shotgun pellets. Bald eagles sometimes feed on sick, crippled, and dead waterfowl and can get lead poisoning from swallowing lead shot contained in the bodies of such birds.

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To decide where nontoxic shot requirements should be proposed to prevent lead poisoning in eagles, the Service identified places that have large waterfowl harvests and large concentrations of wintering bald eagles. The Service included counties that had an average annual waterfowl harvest of 5,000 or more ducks and geese from 1971 to 1980 and a winter count of at least 25 bald eagles in one or more years between 1978 and 1984.

One-hundred-twenty-three counties were identified by this process. Because eagles don't recognize political boundaries during their foraging flights, the Service has also proposed nontoxic shot requirements in an additional 50 counties that are geographically or ecologically contiguous with the original 123 counties. Thus, a total of 173 counties in 26 States are being proposed for nontoxic shot to protect bald eagles. About 75 of these counties were also identified for inclusion as nontoxic shot zones because of lead poisoning in waterfowl, because of monitoring studies on national wildlife refuges, or at State request.

The Service proposed entire counties as nontoxic shot zones to protect bald eagles because of the nature of the data used in the identification process. The Service is requesting that individuals, organizations, and State agencies submit new information on eagles or waterfowl in those counties during the public comment period. Such information will allow boundaries of the proposed zones to be refined while still affording protection to eagles. The proposed eagle protection zones also could be modified if it is determined that the eagles in these areas do not feed on waterfowl as a part of their diet.

The 12 national wildlife refuges where nontoxic shot requirements are being proposed include 11 that were monitored during 1984-85 and found to have a lead-poisoning problem in waterfowl, based on criteria published by the Fish and Wildlife Service in 1985. These refuges are Cibola (Arizona and California); White River (Arkansas); Colusa, Delevan, Modoc, Sacramento, and Sutter (California); Red Rock Lakes (Montana); Ruby Lake and Stillwater (Nevada); and Lewis and Clark (Oregon). In addition, Benton Lake National Wildlife Refuge, which was proposed for nontoxic shot requirements in 1985-86, but not approved by Montana, is being proposed again for the 1986-87 hunting season.

The full text of the proposed nontoxic shot regulations for 1986-87 was published in the January 6, 1986, Federal Register. Public comments are requested and should be submitted by February 5, 1986 to the Director (MBM0), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Room 536 Matomic Bldg., Department of the Interior, Washington, D.C. 20240.

The Fish and Wildlife Service also recently published a draft supplemental environmental impact statement on lead poisoning in migratory birds. Copies of the draft statement may be obtained by writing to the address listed above.

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